

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Protestant Political Parties: A Global Survey*, by Paul Freston.

Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004. 184pp. hb.

£50.00/\$99.95. ISBN 0-7546-4062-0.

**Reviewed by Timothy Sherratt**

Paul Freston's survey of protestant political parties stands out for just the reason its title suggests: it offers a global survey of a relatively poorly understood entity whose better known European representatives do not predict the diverse forms such parties are taking in the developing world. If the work has a weakness, it must be its modesty, a mere one hundred and fifty-five pages to cover developments in nearly forty countries. A second, expanded edition would be welcomed. Even so, this volume appears destined to become the standard work on the subject.

Freston's approach is to offer a generously broad definition of protestant parties, a prudent decision that avoids over-prescription along lines of doctrine or nomenclature. For the survey itself, he describes three waves of protestant party formation, beginning in the Netherlands with the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). Long since merged into CDA, Kuyper's ARP is the grand old man of confessional protestant parties. In the Christian Democratic heartland, protestant parties have been very influential—influential, but not all of them in the first wave of party formation, largely for worldview reasons. German Lutherans embraced a theological outlook less activist than their Dutch Calvinist counterparts, for example. Scandinavia comes next, where recent innovation is the hallmark of parties in Denmark, Finland and the Baltic Republics, although several have served in governing coalitions despite their youth, alongside the more well-established and successful parties of Sweden and Norway.

The regions of the English-speaking world are home to no long-established parties, with Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) the striking exception. Rather than establish parties in the unfriendly terrain of single member district, first-past-the-post electoral arrangements, the norm has been to create all-party groups like the Movement for Christian Democracy (MCD), and for Christians to seek influence in existing institutions political, social and cultural. Even so, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom have all witnessed the creation of protestant parties in recent years, however small these may be, like Canada's Christian Heritage Party (CHP), New Zealand's party of the same name, and Australia's somewhat older Christian Democratic Party. These "white Commonwealth" parties are less like small versions of European Christian Democrat parties and more closely resemble the New Christian Right in the United States. What Freston terms, in reference to the US connection, "undifferentiated appeals for moral recovery," reflects the tone and, one might say, the pressure group character, of these parties.

Protestantism as a phenomenon of the developing, rather than the old, world is, for Freston, the key to understanding protestant politics and parties in Asia and the Pacific. As he notes, all that may hold back the breadth of protestant political experimentation, and party formation, is the unsteady status of democracy in many of the nations involved—there can as yet be no chapter on developments in China, for example. Protestant parties reflect considerable diversity: linked to support for indigenous populations (Fiji); creatures of state control (North Korea); expressions of a set of citizenship requirements in newly independent Indonesia; organizations set up to defend regional and ethnic autonomy (India); and parties whose viability (i.e. Parliamentary seats) was guaranteed as long as the state mandated separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs and Christians (Pakistan).

Africa is something of a paradox, the paucity of protestant parties in sub-Saharan Africa being in direct contrast to the growth of Protestant Christianity. But this paradox is partially resolved, Freston suggests, by the overwhelmingly Christian character of sub-Saharan Africa. Outside of countries where Islamic populations are large and influential, the need to organize minorities of Christians to secure a voice or defend a way of life has been obviated by the sheer numbers—Christianity is “an obligatory idiom of politics.” In Zambia, Christian parties came into being because the attempted Christianization of the country was so superficial, and party leaders felt obliged to attempt a faithful representation of the substance of Christianity. In South Africa, in a somewhat more traditional story, post-Apartheid secularization of the state was the occasion for party formation.

Latin America, with which region Freston has most familiarity—he taught sociology in Brazil for many years—is given two chapters, not on that account but because protestant parties are so numerous in the region. Here the diversity that characterizes, say, Asia and the Pacific, is less evident; indeed, Latin American Protestants confront a similar setting of Catholic hegemony in society and politics. As Freston shows, this lends to Latin American protestant politics a more adversarial character. Heavily Pentecostal and drawn disproportionately from “the poor, less educated, and darker-skinned,” Protestants in Latin America have not voted for the well-developed Christian Democrat parties of the region on account of their Catholicism. But they have ridden the wave of redemocratization and uncertain economic progress; and of a transformation of self-confidence among Protestants, notably in the medium of tele-evangelism, whose leaders have often presented themselves as viable candidates. Moreover, the common context in Latin America has facilitated the diffusion of ideas and organizations from one country to another.

For all this, protestant parties have fared poorly as a mode of political action in contrast to other strategies, including “official denominational candidates distributed through existing parties.” Freston is cautious about their prospects, noting that many are personalistic, naive, and “largely vehicles for personal ambitions.” Just these characteristics sent the Venezuelan *Organizacion Renovadora Autentica* (ORA) on a predictable trajectory of rise and fall under Godofredo Marin from the late 1970s to its near-demise by century’s end.

Freston's survey demonstrates that the protestant leopard does not change his spots just because he organizes a political party. Protestant parties struggle to unite Protestants under their banners because they are subject to familiar cleavages, which play up the old protestant tendency to resolve disagreements "by schism rather than by debate and compromise." Freston extracts from this enduring instinct a silver lining for democracy, which, he argues, faces few dangers from the appearance of protestant parties on the political stage.

To draw general conclusions from the diversity of protestant parties, the reader will find Freston's reliance on Pedersen's "threshold" theory useful. According to this theory, parties are shaped by crossing three thresholds, "declaration"(founding), "representation" (first parliamentary seats), and "relevance" (first participation in a coalition government). By these measures, Freston can group most of the parties he surveys between the first and the second thresholds. But in other respects, diversity of motivation, practice, and organization are the predominant themes.

And there is one other theme that bears reflection, for scholars, theologians, and practicing Christians of all stripes. Throughout his concluding chapter, Freston underscores the importance of the discovery of the new world of protestant parties. To be sure, there is no whiff of the confident conquistador in his analysis, for what he finds, and encourages us to find, is political innovation responding to growth, not a defensive circling of fewer and fewer wagons as the forces of secularization advance. More often than not, the setting is one of revival. The explosive growth of Protestant Christianity in the developing world renders these accounts of protestant parties as fresh accounts of a re-imagining of the complex relationship between religion and politics, a relationship whose story is evidently far from told.

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*An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire,*  
by Michael Northcott. London: I.B.Tauris, 2004. 200pp. hb. \$36.95.

ISBN 1-85043-478-6.

**Reviewed by David Smith**

The curious phrase in the title of this book refers to the language used by President George W.Bush when, in the aftermath of 9/11, he called upon the American people to recognise their divine calling as a nation destined to bring freedom to the earth. The author draws on Bush's rhetoric from the time of his inaugural address in January, 2001, to a speech delivered to religious broadcasters following the attacks on New York and Washington, to demonstrate the

apocalyptic strain that runs through his language. Bush pledged that America would 'build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge' and stated that although the struggle might be long and painful, it would succeed because 'the angel of God directs the storm'. Michael Northcott traces a connection between this arresting phrase and the language employed much earlier in American political history when the Virginia statesmen John Page encouraged Thomas Jefferson to remember that 'an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm'. In other words, Bush was deliberately invoking the language of the Founding Fathers, while also recalling imagery found within the New Testament, particularly the book of Revelation. This fusing of American politics and military policy with the narrative of the Bible constitutes the central concern of the author who states that his aim is to 'show that this millennial spirit rests upon a tragic deformation of true Christianity'. By contrast, the Gospel in fact represents 'a genuine ethical and spiritual alternative to the apocalyptic violence of extreme corporate capitalism and militarist imperialism, and provides important resources for resisting them in the public square'.

There is much in this study to admire and be thankful for. Its outline of American political and religious history, tracing the sense of manifest destiny back to the millennial visions of theologians like Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards is fascinating and informative, and its description of the emergence of a highly politicized Fundamentalism is both timely and alarming. The story told here is of particular concern for Evangelical Christians committed to political engagement precisely because the born-again phenomenon in America plays such a central role in this narrative. George Bush's own experience of Christian conversion under the influence of Billy Graham and Arthur Blessitt is made clear, as is the fact that this deeply personal faith led him to defy the normal conventions of American civil religion by inviting Franklin Graham to pray and pronounce a Trinitarian blessing at his inaugural ceremony in 2001. Vast numbers of American Evangelicals had supported Bush and now felt they were witnessing the answer to their prayers as a President with real faith gained access to the levers of power in the one remaining super-power in the world.

Not surprisingly, Northcott is particularly hard on American Evangelicalism. He somewhat grudgingly acknowledges that this tradition is 'certainly not alone the root of violence' and is aware of radical Evangelicals like Jim Wallis, Tom Sine and Ronald Sider who have strongly opposed the use of the Bible in support of American imperialism. However, in a key chapter entitled 'The Warrior Ethos and the Politics of Jesus', born again Christians are accused of holding a distorted theology derived from the era of Christendom and compounded by extreme eschatological speculations. This ideological form of religion, Northcott asserts, undermines the Gospel and subverts it as Good News to the poor and marginalised.

Much of this critique is to the point and is justified. However, the history of American Evangelicalism is more complicated than is depicted here. For example, Northcott refers to the well known series of booklets entitled 'The Fundamentals' and claims that they expressed anxiety concerning the loss of the

American vision of the nation as a ‘city set on a hill’. Well perhaps, but within these booklets one may discover a discussion of socialism which interprets it as challenging the churches to a ‘more consistent practice’. In the very publications that gave Fundamentalism its name, Charles Eerdman of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote that the rise of socialism reflected ‘a serious protest against the social wrongs and cruelties of the age, against the defects of the present economic system, against special privilege and entrenched injustice, against prevalent poverty, and hunger, and despair’. Wealthy Christians are warned that the Gospel demands close examination of ‘the methods by which power and position and property are acquired’ as well as how they are used because those with wealth will answer to God ‘for every fraction’ selfishly retained or spent.

Clearly, an Evangelicalism that in the course of a century developed into an ideology justifying the most extreme form of capitalism has mutated in a way that would shock the authors of ‘The Fundamentals’. Indeed, the language used by Eerdman suggests that his understanding of the relationship between the Gospel and culture contains interesting parallels with Northcott’s own outline of the ‘politics of Jesus’. This is important not simply because the historical record needs to be set straight, but because it offers a basis on which Fundamentalist Christians in America today can be challenged to return to an earlier, more socially engaged Evangelicalism which retained a strong moral conscience and was able to distinguish between the Gospel and the American way of life.

Despite these reservations, and other questions concerning the details of Northcott’s analysis, this book is to be welcomed. At a time when one hears the engines of modern warfare being cranked up yet again, it is impossible to disagree with the author’s closing words: ‘If another empire is now rising... and if there are those who fight against this empire with terror and violence, the clear import of the book of Revelation is that Christians are to resist the temptation to give their allegiance to it, or to its violent opponents’.

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*Tyranny Through Public Education: The Case Against Government Control of Education*, by William F. Cox, Jr. Fairfax, VA: Allegiance Press, 2003. 552pp. pb. \$26.99. ISBN 1594675430.

**Reviewed by Jason R. Edwards**

Too often the best questions remain unasked because of assumed answers. For instance, though one never stops hearing about citizens’ concerns over the failures of America’s public school system, how frequently does one hear “Aren’t American public schools a clear example of governmental tyranny?” Citizens assume that public schools are innate so while they perpetually wring their hands

over schools' operation they never question their existence. In his book *Tyranny Through Public Education*, author William F. Cox Jr. urges readers not to make that mistake.

In considering this book one must be clear from the start of Cox's intent so as not to fall for any "straw-man" arguments against it. Cox is not arguing against education or even schooling. In fact, it is due to education's significance that Cox wants citizens to be wary of thoughtlessly handing over its reins to government authorities. Do not dismiss Cox as some conspiratorial nutcase however; his argument is well defined, developed, and rooted in the philosophy of America's Founding Fathers specifically and Western Civilization generally.

The core of Cox's argument centers on the First Amendment's guarantee that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Though Americans perpetually argue over what this "separation of church and state" position fully means, essentially any American would agree that at a minimum it ensures that citizens will not be forced to pay tithes to an official state church nor can they be required to attend one. Very little imagination is needed to picture what would happen for instance if Congress today attempted to turn over tax dollars to the Southern Baptist Convention or threatened imprisonment to those found relaxing at home Sunday morning. Yet, as Cox points out, Americans silently comply with legislation that takes their money to evangelize causes and values antagonistic to their own beliefs and even load their own children onto buses for almost daily indoctrination at school. Of course, citizens are not used to thinking of schools as churches but that is the semantic trick that makes the system possible. If schools involve themselves with things such as truth, preparation for life, vocational callings, and values – which of course they do and must – then they are dealing in religion. Consequently, the government through its public schools is both establishing religion and prohibiting its free exercise.

The subtitle of Cox's book is "The Case Against Government Control of Education" and it is hard to imagine that a book has ever had a more accurate title. Much like hiring a high-priced attorney, Cox offers up a detailed philosophic and historic "brief" for his case. Weighing in at just over 550 pages one almost pictures Cox dropping it on an oaken desk in a courtroom across from his despondent opponents while confidently declaring "for my first witness I call Mr. Jefferson." However, one must understand that since he is building a case, generosity towards counter-arguments, placing his work within the broader literature on the subject, academic distance, or even proscriptions for the future are things one will not find. Cox delivers what is promised: the case. Readers seeking something else or something more will have to look elsewhere.

Though much of Western Civilization's philosophic and legal history is included, the overwhelming focus of Cox's work is the American Founding Fathers with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison taking center stage. Though he sometimes finds them wanting for consistency in thought and action, Cox accurately recounts Jefferson's and Madison's positions on natural rights and religious freedom and shows how these views were generally accepted and

incorporated into America's founding documents. Cox's position does assume an allegiance to original intent and philosophic consistency. His standard is exacting so violators are many including not only modern day public schools, but also colonial Puritans and even some legislation proposed by Jefferson himself. Ultimately, his strongest case is against the Federal government's involvement in schooling but Cox's case will cause astute readers to develop a wary eye for state and local officials as well.

Considering the case's presentation, for the first few chapters Cox frankly seems to be searching for the correct audience and tone as the prose at times reads like a college lecture for remedial students as he parenthetically explained who Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Locke were. However, Cox hits his rhetorical stride by the time he explains parental rights and the First Amendment in chapters three and five respectively. His marshalling of evidence is always very thorough, in fact some readers may be eager to move on to the next point, though they will be thankful to have the information and voluminous quotes as a future resource to mine.

Cox's invaluable research does ironically provide the two most pronounced criticisms of the book – one problematic and the other arguably just aesthetic. The problem with Cox's quotes is that they rarely cite the original source; rather, he typically quotes an original source through someone else quoting that author in their book. As such, it makes the quote much more difficult to track down and verify. This problem disturbingly undermines Cox's credibility for while he is being honest as to where he actually found the words, one has to assume he has not read the original documents himself. As such, one is often being presented a series of quotes Cox cherry-picked from other authors' selections, leaving the reader far removed from the original source and dramatically upping the chance for contextual abuse. Aesthetically, it was surprising that Cox (or his editors) chose to rely on distracting in-text citations rather than footnotes. In a similar practical vein, though Cox provides a very valuable and detailed table of contents an index of topics and people was sadly omitted.

With this book Cox hoped to make a "humble step" in the direction of "full educational freedom" and while the work is not flawless he more than accomplished his task. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed Republican president George W. Bush join hands with Democrat Senator Ted Kennedy to pass No Child Left Behind, the largest federal intrusion into American public schools in history, the need for Cox's argument is manifest. Cox's book seems designed primarily for parents of an evangelical persuasion but homeschoolers and private-schoolers of whatever stripe needing or wanting to defend their decision will no doubt appreciate and benefit from the "heavy philosophic lifting" that Cox has performed for them. All concerned citizens and lovers of liberty will benefit from perusing this volume and questioning with Cox the unquestioned.

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*Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within*, by Melanie Phillips. London: Encounter Books, 2006. 200pp hb, 208pp pb. £14.99/\$25.95. ISBN 1594031444 hb, 1-59403-197-5 pb.

**Reviewed by Chris Lazenby**

Melanie Phillips's *Londonistan* is not particularly aimed at Christians but is a book which probably all Christians will find informative to some degree. Phillips mounts a fearless (and in places searing) attack on what she sees as Britain's apparent sleepwalk into the sacrificing of its culture beneath the tramping feet of a relentlessly advancing Islamism. Of course, some Christians will not agree with all of Phillips's analysis of the current politico-religious situation in Britain. But, nevertheless, it is refreshing to find someone with the courage to give us an alternative view of the current British landscape; one which counters the well chanted mantras of most politicians and the politically correct branches of the media.

In the first chapter of *Londonistan*, Phillips points out that the official number of Muslims in Britain currently stands at 1.6 million, this figure being likely to be higher when illegal immigration is taken into account. But even the official figure makes Islam the second biggest faith group in the UK today, where more people now attend a mosque each week than attend an Anglican church. This Islamic faith group, along with its culture may be largely peace loving as Phillips reminds us, but nevertheless, for many - especially younger Muslims - there is a growing unrest with western culture and its values. This unrest is fuelled, claims Phillips, by a sub-culture which includes radical preaching and the distribution of literature, videos and DVDs which are both critical of the west and often fiercely anti-Semitic. The resulting picture is one of dissatisfaction and a desire amongst many within this group to undermine the (mostly secular) western way of life, and replace it with Islamic culture and laws.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing things about the book is the evidence Phillips presents which reveals Britain as a country in denial. As she points out, until the bombings of 2005, preachers of hate such as Abu Hamza were treated as 'little more than pantomime villains.' Indeed, she demonstrates that Britain has been so lax in the past as to not only welcome those with extreme views, but at the same time to shower with benefits the very people who would threaten our national security. This cavalier attitude of the British establishment during the '80s and '90s led many of those working in the arena of national security on the continent to nickname Britain's capital 'Londonistan', giving Phillips her ready-made book title.

One of the main factors which has fostered and allowed the current state of affairs to arise is, according to Phillips, the largely unquestioned acceptance of multiculturalism. Since the 1960s, Britain's role as host culture to many immigrants has been downplayed to such an extent that today, any attempt to emphasise or bring out this host culture is seen as being 'racist'. As a perfect example of this claim, Phillips quotes the Runnymede Trust, which, in 2000, said



that there should not be 'a fixed conception of national identity and culture' and that 'Britishness has systematically, largely unspoken, racial connotations.'

The Christian Church has deeply absorbed this seemingly accepted wisdom, and, according to Phillips, has not helped to improve the situation. On the Sunday which followed the 2005 bombing of the bus in London's Russell Square for example, she quotes the priest of the nearby parish church as saying in his sermon: 'There is one small practical thing that we can all do. We can name the people who did these things as criminals or terrorists. We must not name them as Muslims.'

According to Phillips, not only has the Church largely failed to speak out against the threat of militant Islam (in some quarters even accepting the argument that the west has brought 9/11 and 7/7 upon itself), but it has also failed to defend Britain's Christian heritage. She quotes an Anglican bishop as saying (typically for the C of E) that 'there is no one truth, and we all have to respect each others' truths.' Phillips goes on from this to observe that a church which can't distinguish truth from error must no longer believe its own message to be true, and claims that the Church has abandoned the doctrines of Christianity and instead worships 'social liberalism'. The Church has stopped being concerned with the salvation of souls, she says, and instead has started 'trying to change society.'

Phillips has written a powerful and clear critique of militant Islamism and the failure of the west, especially Britain, to see the danger coming. For the most part, her criticisms of the Church have the painful ring of truth about them. However, some Christians will (naturally) find points at which they would take issue with her analysis of the Church's place and role in Britain today. For instance, her point cited above, that the Church is 'trying to change society', would surprise most true Christians, who would surely respond by saying that part of the Church's role is *precisely* to attempt to change society. There are a lot of British evangelicals too, who would raise an eyebrow on reading that they, unlike their American counterparts, have failed to speak out in defence of Israel.

Although Melanie Phillips is an intellectual, this book is not aimed at an academic audience. The book draws on primary sources but does not engage with secondary sources and academic literature which might explore in more depth some of the relevant issues. But for a book which is aimed at a wide readership this is, perhaps, to be expected. *Londonistan* is an important book; courageous, well written, well researched and well supported by quotations, referenced to several pages of endnotes. I recommend it to all Christians, whatever their theological stance. But be warned, it is neither easy, nor comfortable reading.

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*Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*, by Gary M. Burge. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003. xviii+286pp. hb. \$23.00. ISBN 0-8298-1660-7.

**Reviewed by Calvin Smith**

As the title indicates, this book is concerned with who owns the Holy Land. At the outset, Gary Burge explains how he struggles with rival biblical versus historical claims to the land by both Jews and Arabs, asking if it can really be justifiable to evict Arabs who have lived on the land for centuries on the basis of an ancient promise made in the book of Joshua. He also questions the eschatological zeal driving Christian Zionism which he believes ignores major ethical problems in Israel today. Hence, Burge is keen to provide an alternative view of the situation in the Middle East to Christians he believes are not being told the entire story. Yet despite championing Palestinian self-determination without Israeli interference, nonetheless he also believes Israel's security and right to exist must be secured if there is to be lasting peace in the region. Moreover, while the Old Testament covenant has been abrogated, this "should not diminish the church's respect for Judaism nor the rights of the Jewish people to live in the land of Israel" (xviii).

The book begins with a description and historical survey of the land, before moving on to theme of land ownership in the Old Testament. Burge demonstrates how the land is intimately connected to God's covenant with Abraham and Israel. Yet control of the land was conditional upon Israel's faithfulness: "Possession of the land is linked to covenant fidelity" (74). Israel does not actually own the land, rather she is a tenant entrusted with it only as long as she is in a covenant relationship with God. Thus, the promise of the land is indeed eternal, but only provided Israel remains faithful to God.

Burge then moves on to explore the theme of the land in the New Testament, noting how, by and large, it is absent there. Focusing on the abrogation of the Old Testament law, he argues that the promises made to Abraham are now spiritualised in and through Jesus, who is a new Moses:

*Jesus himself becomes the locus of the holy space... Just as Moses was leading the people of Israel to their promised land, so too, Jesus leads God's people. But now we learn that Jesus himself is in reality that which the land had offered only in form. To grasp after land is like grasping after bread – when all along we should discover that Jesus is 'the bread of life' (175).*

Thus, the book argues, the true descendants of Abraham (that is, Christians rather than simply Jews) will inherit the *whole* world, rather than simply the tiny strip of land which is modern day Israel. Yet Burge cannot quite bring himself to reject fully the notion that the Jews and Judaism retain some special significance in the divine plan, stating that unbelieving Judaism is still beloved of God and retains an

‘enduring role’. “For the sake of their history, for the sake of the promises made to their ancestors, God will retain a place for Jews in history” (187). But whether Burge is simply suggesting Jewish believers are grafted onto the Church (cf Rom 11:17ff), or else something more substantial, is unclear. The book concludes with a brief survey of Palestinian Christianity, a critique of Christian Zionism (“Many of us within the evangelical church are offended by Christian Zionism”, 246), and highlights Evangelical organisations that reject Christian Zionism.

Importantly, Burge offers his readers anecdotal evidence of the maltreatment of Palestinians which those Christian Zionists who take an “Israel right or wrong” stance do well to note and engage with. He also calls for a more balanced and objective Christian treatment of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and throughout the book he draws on his own personal experiences in the region (he was an exchange student in 1970s Lebanon). Yet in drawing so strongly on many emotionally-charged anecdotes from one of the two communities only, Burge falls into the very trap he wants pro-Israeli Christians to avoid. Thus, while much of his material is worthy of scholarly consideration, it is not always objective. Meanwhile, the author’s at times one-sidedness fails to differentiate adequately between Israeli treatment of Palestinian and Israeli Arabs (even though the latter enjoy some rights not found in several Arab countries). Burge also portrays Palestinian Christianity as monolithic, which is not the case, while some of the language he employs is unnecessarily pejorative and compromises his objectivity. After all, it is this very emotion-charged rhetoric that has been one of the enduring problems when exploring this conflict.

Moreover, Burge’s focus on the Old Testament theme of treating the alien fairly in order to demonstrate Israel’s failings towards Palestinians today is also partial and one-sided. He fails to discuss how in the Old Testament alien inclusion was covenantal, whereby the alien agreed to become a participatory member of the congregation of Israel and abide by the terms of the covenant. Thus, such a biblical theology argument cannot really be brought to bear on the present conflict. Arguably, too, the book demonstrates a certain naivety in its apparent support for aspects of post-Zionism, given that powerful and extreme voices on the Palestinian side call not only for the complete annihilation of Israel but also the restoration of full Muslim control over the land. It is hard to see, then, how a post-Zionist, multicultural state could possibly survive and exist in peace in the present climate with other than the tiniest of Jewish minorities permitted to remain. Besides, the Gaza pull-out has, if anything, strengthened the extremist voices on the Palestinian side, calling into question some of Burge’s views (written prior to the Gaza pullout) concerning what Israel must do to make peace with the Palestinians.

Another problem is how Burge downplays the biblical theme of eschatology. It is indeed true that popular eschatology is often speculative, sensational, and not rooted in good theology. But in reacting against such extremes Burge arguably goes too far the other way, throwing out the eschatological baby with the dispensational bathwater. After all, *Heilsgechichte* (salvation history) covers the

*whole* of human existence, and if the Church has no overriding eschatological hope to draw upon, what is the point? The eschatological culmination of the age, including its personal and cosmic ramifications, and the promise of spending eternity with Christ are absolutely vital and central aspects of Jesus' message and mission. Eschatology, then, represents the conclusive outworking of salvation history, while the theme of Israel arguably features strongly in the Bible's treatment of eschatology. As such, the theme of eschatology in any discussion of whether modern and biblical Israel are one and the same cannot be so lightly dismissed.

This downplaying of the biblical theology theme of eschatology is a pity, because biblical theology is precisely one of the stronger points of the book. At a time when biblical theology is back in the ascendancy within academic theology, the focus on land as a biblical theme is useful. Burge's attempts to counterbalance some of the extreme Christian Zionist views also make this an important book, as does the fact that it contributes to a burgeoning body of scholarly literature exploring the modern state of Israel from a theological perspective. As such, anyone interested in these issues should make sure they read this book.

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*Tales of Two Cities: Christianity and Politics*, edited by Stephen Clark,  
Leicester: IVP, 2005. 294pp. pb. £14.99. ISBN 978-1-84474-096-3

**Reviewed by Brian Edgar**

*Tales of Two Cities* comprises seven contributions on aspects of the relationship of Christian faith with contemporary, secular, pluralist politics. The papers were originally presented at a conference organised by Affinity, a network of approximately 1,200 churches throughout Great Britain and Ireland.

The papers vary considerably in length and style. Field's discussion of Rutherford is particularly lengthy. There is a strong historical leaning with the writers generally seeking to find wisdom for the present from writers of the past. In terms of approach there is certainly an affinity, we might say, between the papers, for they have a shared appreciation for Augustine and various Reformed writers. Nonetheless, around this commonality the papers are varied in content and approach, especially concerning the value and nature of secular pluralism and the extent to which the rule of God is to be seen in present political structures. The book as a whole is a very useful contribution to the field.

Beyond this, it is difficult to generalise about papers from different authors. Each paper has to stand on its own merits. The final paper, by Stephen Clark discusses the relationship between 'Jerusalem' and 'Westminster' via a review of

the previous six papers and a discussion of some fundamental principles for Christians engaging with the State. The following paragraphs summarise some of the most salient points of the various essays.

Gordon Wenham begins the compendium with a canonical approach to the contrast between Old Testament law as a necessity in a fallen world and the ideal standards expected of Christians. He explores the way that law can be transposed into Western multicultural society today, and the need for compromise with regard to the specifics of legislation because of the reality of pluralism. He argues that biblical principles can, however, be attractive to many people and should be commended wherever possible.

In 'Was Jesus political?' Steve Wilmshurst argues that Jesus' mission has an unmistakably political dimension which is best understood in terms of a collision of power structures. Jesus' agenda was not aimed primarily at changing earthly power structures but Jesus calls his followers to a radically new and wholly exclusive commitment where other loyalties - including ethnic loyalties and nationalism - are abolished. He also issues a political challenge to the world at large by attacking the foundation of the earthly politics by calling on rulers to abandon their pretensions to power and to recognise the true source of the power they do possess.

David Field presents an extensive summary of Samuel Rutherford's thinking about civil government as found in *Lex, Rex* (1644). Civil government exists for the well-being and protection of the people whose highest good is found in the practice of true religion. The essence of civil government is in its embodiment of the law of God which it is to declare legislatively, apply judicially and enforce executively. There is a tension between, on the one hand, those aspects of Rutherford's thought which are attractive to modern liberalism (the division of powers, checks and balances, emphasis on the rule of law, person-office distinction) and, on the other hand, his Calvinist doctrine of providence, a reformed and covenantal reading of scripture and a tendency towards a form of Christendom.

The life and thought of Edward Miall, nineteenth century journalist, politician, nonconformist, committed dis-establishmentarian and author of a series of essays known together as 'The Politics of Christianity' is presented by David W. Smith. Miall opposed war, the inherent evils of colonialism and the implicit ecclesiastical legitimisation of commercialisation (or 'the trade spirit') and the subjugation of certain classes. He was prescient in observing a dangerous trend towards individualism and the privatisation of religion and warned of the dangers of Christianity having too much political power.

Paul Helm takes an Augustinian approach to Christianity and politics in a pluralist society. Pluralism itself can be defended by appeal to the moral principles of Christianity ('do unto others as you would have them do unto you') or to the instrumental value pluralism (it is necessary to tolerate such a thing lest a worse thing come about). It also helps discourage the corrupting effect of a unified political power. There are, however, limits to pluralism - as when

legislation would require Christians to sin – and Christians must not be seduced by it and fall into relativism or indifferentism. This view of pluralism is consistent with Christian exclusivity because the kingdom does not have independent, visible expression until the return of the King. Moreover, nothing that we know of the heavenly state rules out a form of pluralism and differences of opinion – given that heaven is a world of love and one aspect of love is forbearance.

David Mackay outlines the thought of Alexander MacLeod (1774-1833) on ‘the crown rights of King Jesus today’ as Messiah and governor of the nations of the earth.

MacLeod, a Scotsman, was a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in New York. Mackay relates this view of present kingship to the concept of Christ as a crucified king. Thus asserting the crown rights of Jesus does not mean making people Christians by legislation or political programs, as Christ reigns precisely in his suffering.

Altogether, a book which will be a fine resource for those interested in considering the way of Christ in the contemporary political world.

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*Being Christian in an Almost Christian Nation: Thinking About Faith and Politics*, by H. Stephen Shoemaker. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

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**Reviewed by Jon DePriest**

Since the tragedy of 9/11, there has been a heightened interest in the role “faith” plays in the course of human events. To answer these cries for understanding, voices from political scientists, historians, and preachers have straddled the blurry line of where faith intersects in the events of life. It is in this quandary of voices that H. Stephen Shoemaker, pastor of *Myers Park Baptist Church* in Charlotte, North Carolina, lends his perspective. His view combines a neo-orthodox, Southern Baptist training with a fervent desire to bring healing to the politicized debate in America. Although Shoemaker’s book, *Being Christian in an Almost Christian Nation*, tends to be fractured as an individual work, the dialog presented in the various essays and sermons carve out usable space in the ignored center—a place of moderated wisdom.

The goal of this book is to generate a middle ground where both liberals and conservatives of faith can live in peace amid disagreement. The book is organized into two parts—essays and sermons, where the one unifying feature is that the chapters all deal with the place of faith in the post-9/11 public square. Because of the disjointed structure of the book, some chapters work better than others in advancing the purpose. Part One: *Thinking About Faith and Politics*, addresses

the idea of American exceptionalism (called “chosenness” or messianism) and America’s role in the midst of the current crisis of violence, while incorporating adjacent chapters on the posture of Jesus toward violence and how a Christian should use His words to pray for healing. The best chapter in this section, “*America’s Place in the World*,” reaches deep into an academic analysis of the *National Security Strategy* written by the Bush administration in 2002. Here Shoemaker demonstrates the shift from the Cold War’s mutually assured destruction to a unilateral ability of the remaining superpower to dictate the level of destruction on other nations. Shoemaker argues for a peaceful application of this unique position as a “redeemer nation” to replace the current practice of determining the fate of nations around the world.

Part Two: *Preaching about Faith and Politics* presents a better chronological arrangement of sermons that Shoemaker preached between the news of going to war in Iraq in 2002 through the elections in 2004. Because these sermons follow the course of events of those years, each builds consistently on the previous. Here, the reader is rewarded by the inquisitive searching of a concerned cleric. Shoemaker exemplifies the kind of longing for truth in the midst of the unexplainable terror that the current crisis has borne. His search takes him to the Scriptures and to Jesus—his role model for pacifism. In “*The Death of Jesus, which is Life to the World*,” Shoemaker brings a stronger than usual conviction, which enhances the power of this vital argument. Noting the irony of how human “violence toward expendable victims in the hope that their banishment or death may be the saving of the whole,” (98) Shoemaker argues that God cares for “the one excluded, the outcast, the ‘other,’ the one who is different.” (99) Unfortunately, several sermons pose simple systematic answers to more than complex issues, including “*How to Be Christian in an Election Year*.” Overall, however, his aim to place a moderate stance in open dialog holds throughout the section.

For Shoemaker, like many theologians, the crux of the argument comes down to the role God plays in the affairs of man. In this book, God stands as the Supreme Judge who rewards the obedient and withholds His blessing on those who fail to give themselves to others. Shoemaker’s view of God’s role extends to the collective action of nations. Hence, Shoemaker is particularly grieved as the news became public of the abuses of Abu Ghraib prison. His personal account includes his admission that as an American, he was complicit in those grotesque actions. In this book’s philosophy, however, God’s perfect Providence checks the extent of human evil or even presumptive righteousness, both of which extend a religious fanaticism (maximalists) which divides humanity and therefore obscures God’s good intentions.

As with any person writing in today’s spectrum of politics, Shoemaker’s book is not free of bias. He stumbles into a short tirade against the Religious Right in chapter one concerning the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, then amplifies his invective on this group in the chapter called “*The Politics of Doomsday*.” It is not that he is wrong in his overall criticism of those

in the Religious Right, who confuse God's plan with their own understanding, but that his model for building bridges for majoritarian dialog demands a willingness to withhold that sort of group criticism.

Shoemaker's occasional simplicity emerges in solutions over semantics. His efforts to breach the discussion with changes in language generally fail to satisfy. For example, to call the United States a "servant nation" instead of "elect nation" or "chosen nation," or his idea to push the categories back to the early twentieth century designations of traditional and progressive rather than the more inflammatory fundamentalist or liberal, will not bridge the current polarization that fractures America. In the postscript, Shoemaker advocates a reinterpreted form of a "city on a hill" that brings "healing" to the nations. Nevertheless, once one chooses that longtime designation for America, it inevitably leads to an interpretation of what kind of light should be spread. For many in the past, that light has been the red glare of missiles sending a message to the targets of evil. I would think it better to move on from such a heritage.

Overall, it is in Shoemaker's tone that the strength of this book is found. His approach to these harrowing problems is one of searching for solutions (truth). He is soft-spoken and humble, finding key role models from the past in Lincoln, Reinhold Neibuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thomas Jefferson—all of whom advocated an informed religion in public discussion, but not the sort that becomes an ordained stance on how God would determine as the role of government. So while this book should not be considered an extensive research effort in history or political science, its inquisitive nature has much to offer to the Christ-follower as guidelines for scriptural and philosophical questions. When viewed in that light, the longer extended discussions that emerge around authors like Allan Guelzo, John Howard Yoder, and Reinhold Neibuhr do not need to be viewed as lacking integration, but as launching points for further discovery.

In the end, Christians can work toward a more sympathetic middle ground. In fact, this sort of healing is essential in our combative religious culture. As Shoemaker notes, "If our land is to be healed of its deep divisions, faith communities must lead the way, but not in the way that smooths over the differences that now divide. Instead, we must lead the way that listens deeply to our differences and calls us to a vision that transcends them." (139) As a point of departure for this kind of healing, *Being Christian in an Almost Christian Nation* has its place.

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